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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 001472

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DEPARTMENT FOR D, AF A/S FRAZER, AF S/E NATSOS, AND AF/SPG  
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON  
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2012

TAGS: PREL PGOV KPKO UN AU SU US

SUBJECT: FM AKOL DISCUSSES UNGA, U.S.-SUDAN RELATIONS

Classified By: CDA Alberto Fernandez, Reason: Sections 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. Meeting with Foreign Minister Lam Akol, CDA Fernandez previewed two critical issues that would be raised during Akol's visit to New York on September 21: Sudan's cooperation on facilitating the deployment of the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the hold put on the release of over 4,000 tons of U.S.-grown World Food Program (WFP) rations for Darfur. CDA Fernandez encouraged Akol to raise Sudan's concerns about the bilateral relationship with the U.S. delegation in New York, noting that Washington was interested in exploring the possibility of an improvement in relations. Akol said that he planned to ask the U.S. for assistance in ensuring broad rebel participation in the Darfur peace talks scheduled for October. End summary.

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PKO "Growing Immensely"  
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¶12. (C) In a September 18 meeting with Foreign Minister Lam Akol, CDA Fernandez previewed two issues that he expected to be discussion points during Akol's September 21 meeting with Deputy Secretary Negroponte in New York: Sudan's cooperation on facilitating the deployment of the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the delay in the release of over 4,000 tons of U.S.-grown World Food Program (WFP) rations for Darfur. CDA Fernandez explained that the deployment of UNAMID presented a massive administrative challenge given the amount of equipment and personnel that would need to enter the country. "Procedures for UNMIS and AMIS will be in overdrive with the hybrid, in fourth gear," said CDA Fernandez. He predicted that some in the Sudanese Government would "look to make trouble" by throwing up administrative roadblocks and urged that Sudan avoid such actions, which the international community would interpret as official Sudanese policy.

¶13. (C) Akol said that Sudan was committed to UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1769. He insisted that Khartoum was not acting under pressure from international public opinion but because, unlike UNSCR 1706, it had been consulted in the drafting of the resolution. The inter-agency technical committee charged with PKO deployment and headed by MFA Undersecretary Mutriff Siddiq had met September 12 and had "cleared" several land issues, including one for the UNAMID base in Zalingei, according to Akol. "We understand the enormity of the task and the size of the equipment needs, and we are moving," he assured the CDA. CDA asked that the Sudanese Government expedite the movement of people and equipment from US contractor PAE so that everything can be made ready in time for the October 14 arrival of a new Rwanda

Battalion. This process has worked relatively well so far but it needs to be accelerated as UNAMID deployment begins in earnest.

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Food Rations  
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¶4. (C) A contentious discussion ensued when CDA Fernandez raised the issue of the 4,000 metric tons of WFP food rations held in customs because the Sudanese Government questioned the health impact of consuming genetically modified organisms (GMO). The CDA said that WFP would have to cut the rations for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Darfur in October if the issue was not resolved--which would cause a negative backlash against Khartoum just as the Darfur peace talks were beginning in Libya. "This is a perfect example of what drives people outside Sudan crazy," said the CDA.

¶5. (C) Unyielding, Akol said that Europe was as equally concerned as Sudan about genetically modified products and said that Sudan "must adhere to our standards." He then dismissed the issue, saying that it was being handled by the Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC). CDA Fernandez again underscored the importance of urgently addressing the problem, noting that the possibly incorrect perception in the West would be that Sudan was trying to starve the people of Darfur. Akol asked, "couldn't you just donate ordinary sorghum, that is what the people eat there and what you used to donate in the past?"

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Atmosphere for Frank Discussions  
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¶6. (C) On both the deployment of the hybrid force and the release of the WFP rations from customs, CDA Fernandez said that Sudan had the opportunity to change the perception in the U.S. that Khartoum "could not be trusted." Akol said that Sudan felt the same about the U.S. While he recognized that Sudanese foreign policy before 2005 had antagonized the West, Khartoum believed that a new chapter would open in the bilateral relationship with the U.S. following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. Instead, the U.S. had an overt bias in favor of Southern Sudan and Darfur as a whole. Recent sanctions directed at the Northern half of the country, coming just after Sudan had agreed to the UN Heavy Support Package for the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), typified this policy. "I thought you were serious about the unity of the country, but you are going to scuttle the CPA...If the long range view like this continues with bumpy relations, the CPA suffers, Darfur suffers, and Sudan suffers," said Akol. Charge noted that the bilateral environment was somewhat better than it was at last year, s UNGA and Akol heartily agreed.

¶7. (C) CDA Fernandez encouraged Akol to engage the U.S. delegation in New York to raise the "issues that really bother Sudan, to be frank with them. There is interest in DC to see if/if there can be an improvement in relations." The U.S. distrusted Sudan's sincerity, and while it recognized recent positive actions, such as agreement to UNSCR 1769 and the release of former Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) humanitarian coordinator Suleiman Jamous, trust needed to be rebuilt to the point where issues such as WFP rations could be dealt with in an "automatic way."

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Rebel Participation in Libya Essential  
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¶8. (C) Akol said that he intended to request U.S. assistance in ensuring the participation of all of the Darfur rebel movements at the peace talks in Libya to begin October 27.

"Attendance is the basic thing," said Akol. "We want this meeting to be the last one." CDA Fernandez concurred that while "you can't force the parties to agree to an agreement, they should attend." He said that the U.S. was concerned that some rebels thought they could gain more by staying out of the process. According to Akol, U.S. criticism of Sudan empowered the more intransigent rebel elements, which interpreted U.S. criticism as support for their cause. CDA Fernandez highlighted the U.S. statement condemning the recent Justice and Equality Movement (JEM)/SLA-Unity attack in Kordofan as an example of the U.S.' balanced approach. Akol added that Sudan does not want the talks to fail and certainly does not want to be blamed for the rebels' intransigence.

¶9. (C) Comment: The internal contradictions which are Lam Akol were fully on display in this relatively cordial (despite the exchange on the GMO Food for Peace shipment) meeting. As a renegade Southerner alienated from the SPLM and relying on NCP support to stay in office, Akol has to be more aggressive than any Northerner would be. The SPLM wants him out but the NCP is convinced of his utility. Akol also discounted any possibility of a return to war with the South, something which deeply worries many of his Southern colleagues. With very full briefings this week for both Minister of State Al-Wasila and Foreign Minister Akol, the Sudanese should certainly not be surprised by any concerns we raise in New York. How specifically and positively they respond to these concerns will be evidence of both their political will and their own administrative ability and internal decision-making process. End comment.

FERNANDEZ